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ABSTRACT

A study examined the relationship between the commitment on the part of teachers to either their profession or their employing school districts and their attitudes towards professional and militant activities. The sample consisted of responses from 394 elementary and secondary school teachers (of 625 employed in two western New York school districts, one city and one central, comparable in size and enrollment). Attitudes were measured by a semantic differential scale, and commitment by a questionnaire regarding inducements necessary for the teacher to leave the profession or the district. Major findings: Organizational and professional commitments are significantly related to positive evaluations of professional activities and negative evaluations of militant activities. There is a much stronger relationship between demographic background factors and favorable evaluations of militant activities than between these factors and favorable evaluations of professional activities. The relationship between high organizational or professional commitment and unfavorable evaluation of militant activities was statistically significant only for females, while a significant relationship between high commitment and favorable evaluation of professional activities existed only for the under 29 age group. Individuals with higher organizational commitments were more negative toward militant activities; those with high professional commitment were not. (JS)

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Commitment and Attitudes

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INTRODUCTION

How professionally committed can a teacher with a picket sign be? With the emergence of collective negotiations and the spread of teacher strikes, this question takes on new social and theoretical importance. This paper examines the relationship between the commitment on the part of teachers to either their profession or their employing school districts and their attitudes towards professional and militant activities.

Previous researchers have examined the relationship between certain characteristics of teachers and their attitudes toward either professional or militant activities. This research indicates that teachers who are younger (Ryans), married male (Mason, Dressel and Bain) employed in secondary schools (Leiberman) coming from higher social class backgrounds (Colombotos) tend to be more professional in orientation. Whereas more recently, Cole has reported information which indicates that teachers who are more disposed to utilize militant action tend to be younger, male, and come from working class, Jewish family backgrounds. Lieberman and Moscow have noted similar characteristics among the leaders of militant actions in several different school settings. This would seem to indicate that individuals with similar backgrounds tend to be both professionally oriented and engaging in militant activities.

In addition, Cole has pointed out that situational considerations effect attitudes toward militant action. His data confirm that the saliency of reference groups, the attitudes of reference group members and the existence of primary group reinforcement are three major situational variables which effect attitudinal predispositions toward militant action. Similarly, Abbott postulates that perceptions of reference group norms and organizational rewards are two other significant variables which effect attitudes. Both of the variables specified by Cole and Abbott, in turn, will be influenced by an individual teacher's commitment to both his profession and his organization.

Professional commitment, as an intervening variable, will influence a teacher's choice of reference groups and their saliency to him. For more professionally committed teachers, professional groups should be more salient and more influential in the determination of attitudes. Similarly, the more organizationally committed teacher is likely to be more influenced by the norms, attitudes, and expectations held by organizationally based reference groups. By the same token, organizational or professional commitment will influence an individual's perception of the organizational or professional reward system and the relative importance of that reward system to the individual. Thus, commitment, by effecting the saliency of various reference groups and reward systems will influence a teachers attitude towards various forms of militant or professional activities. Previous studies, however, have not related commitment as a situational intervening variable to the formation of attitudes, nor examined the relative impact of various background factors on the relationship between commitment and these predispositions. This paper will report data on both of these relationships.

The importance of this potential relationship between commitment and attitudes towards militant action is highlighted by strong feelings expressed on both sides. On the one hand, is an aggregate including such diverse individuals as the president of the largest union unit of teachers, Mr. Albert Shanker, and Professor Ronald Corwin. They argue that militancy is a necessary ingredient in the professionalization of the teaching occupation. Preliminary evidence indicates that teachers have engaged in militant collective action in order to advance professional goals. We have previously reported data which indicates that in the 1967 New York City strike the most salient issues were those which concerned the rights of teachers to influence educational policies and programs. Additional evidence gathered from school districts in upstate New York in 1968 indicated that in at least five of eight districts surveyed, teachers bargained for and received significant additional

influence over educational decision making processes. These data indicate that in the past year or two teachers have attempted to extend the boundaries of their professional control through militant collective bargaining activities.

On the other hand, there is the strongly voiced opinion that utilizing unprofessional means to accomplish professional ends corrupts the very objectives which are so ilbegottenly obtained. Not only do the ends not justify the means, but the very core of professionalism rejects the use of coersive action -- since coersive action damages the viability of both the employing organization and the profession, two institutions to whom the professional presumably has a strong commitment. This paper also attempts to shed some empirical light on the relationship between professional orientations and attitudes toward militant action.

METHODOLOGY

The sample upon which the study was based consisted of responses from 394 elementary and secondary school teachers out of a population of 625 (63%) employed in two western New York school districts, one a city school district and the other a central school district, comparable in size and student enrollment. Analysis indicated that the 394 teachers who responded were not statistically different from the total population in terms of sex, age, and length of service.

Two instruments were administered to all teachers. Attitudinal information was gathered via semantic differential scales. These scales measured the respondents attitude toward five activities, three of which were classified as professional activities (teaching as a career, professional associations, and teacher/administrator cooperation) and two of which were classified as professional activities (stikes for teachers and unions for teachers). As the means of measuring the important connotative meanings associated with these activities, teachers were asked to respond to the bi-polar adjectives of good-bad, harmful-beneficial, wise-foolish, reputable-disreputable arranged on a seven point continuum. Taken together these scales

yielded a factor indicating the individuals judgement concerning the desirability of these various activities.

Commitment was was ascertained from a series of questions which focused on the inducements necessary for a teacher to leave either his profession or his employing school district. By commitment, therefore, we mean the probability that a person will continue in either his organization or his profession despite a variety of inducements to leave. Such an approach was suggested by Becker:

> If for instance, a person refuses to change jobs even though the new job offers a higher salary and better working conditions, we should suspect that his decision is a result of commitment, that sets of rewards other than income and working conditions have become attached to his present job and it is too painful for him to change. He may have a large pension at stake which he may lose if he moves. He may dread the cost of making new friends and learning to get along with a new set of working associates. He may feel that he may get a reputation of being flighty and erratic, if he leaves his present job.

Specifically, prior analyses indicated that responses to the following four items discriminated among respondent's commitment level: a slight increase in pay; slightly more freedom to be creative; slightly more status; an opportunity to work with poeple who are a little friendlier. The reliability for both instruments was established at the .85 level on a sample of 75 elementary ans secondary school teachers in New York City subjected to a three week interval test re-test method.

FINDINGS

The data presented in the following sections lead to the following conclusions: (1) Organizational and professional commitments are significantly related to positive evaluations of professional activities and negative evaluations of militant activities. (2) There is a much stronger relationship between demographic background factors and favorable evaluations of militant activities than there is between these factors and favorable evaluations of professional activities. (3) The relationship between demographic background factors and commitment suggests that not all stratas within the

teaching population are equally committed. Some individuals tend to be committed to neither. In addition those teachers committed to neither tend to more favorably evaluate militant activities. (4) Personal background factors effected the relationship between commitment and attitudes. The relationship between high organizational or professional commitment and unfavorable evaluation of militant activities was statistically significant only for the female strata of the teaching population, while a significant relationship between high commitment and favorable evaluation of professional activities existed only for the less than 29 age group. (5) Background characteristics apparantly differentially effected the relationship between commitment and attitudes. Those individuals who had higher organizational commitments were more negative towards militant activities while those with high professional commitment were not.

Commitment and Attitudes

Table 1 reports a summary of the chi square relationship between professional commitment, organizational commitment and the five attitudinal items examined in this study. Two clear trends emerge from the data. In the first place, there is a strongly positive relationship between both professional and organizational commitment and two of the three professional activities examined in the study, teaching as a career and teacher-administrator cooperation. In addition, all relationships were positive, indicating that high professional commitment is associated with favorable evaluations of these professional activities.

For example, highly committed respondents hold more favorable attitudes towards teaching as a career. A full 44% of the highly committed group report high evaluations of that activity as compared to only 28% and 25% of the low and medium commitment groups. Conversely, considering those individuals who least favorably evaluate teaching as a career, it is obvious that the largest relative share of that group can be found in the low commitment group. This relationship between commitment and

favorable attitudes towards teaching as a career may well flow from the need for cognitive consistancy, for holding in low esteem one's own career would indeed presume a state of dissonance for the teacher who has contributed a great deal of time and energy to that career. Accordingly, it is the person with the fewest perceived investments and the lowest attachment who would be most likely to forsake his teaching career. In the same vein, fewer highly committed teachers hold a low evaluation of professional associations then less committed teachers -- 6% versus 16% respectively. On the other hand, 31% of the highly committed as compared with 23% of the less committed teachers have high evaluations of professional associations. Higher levels of commitment then are associated with more favorable evaluations of professional associations, thus, reinforcing the observations of Carr-Saunders that committed members of professional groups tend to attach significant importance ot their representative associations.

Similarly, there is a statistically significant positive relationship in two of the three instances which relate organizational commitment to attitudes towards these professional activities. Furthermore, as in the case of professional commitment, all relationships between organizational commitment and the evaluation of the professional activities are positive.

Secondly, the relationship between both professional and organizational commitment and the evaluation of militant activities is clearly negative. In all instances ther is a statistically significant negative relationship between either professional or organizational commitment and the evaluation of strikes and unions. For example, while 24% of the teachers displaying low commitment to the profession hold high evaluations of unions only 14% of highly committed subjects do. Only 7% of highly committed teachers evaluated the strike activity favorably, while a full 21% of the low commitment group did. Similarly, 11% and 13% of the teachers in the low and medium organizational commitment groups hold low evaluations of the unions while 27% of the teachers who are highly committed to their organization express these negative evalu-

ations.

This clearly indicates that the more professionally committed teachers have decidedly negative attitudes towards militant action. In a sense, this single finding seems to contradict Corwin's hypothesis that professionalization is a militant process, and highlights again the nature of commitment as an intervening variable which effects the attitudes of teachers towards either professional or militant activities.

Background Factors and Attitudes

While commitment is related to positive evaluations of professional activities and negative evaluations of the militant activities, these attitudes are influenced by other factors. Specifically, personal backgrounds have been shown to effect attitudinal predispositions. Therefore, we examined four of these demographic characteristics (e.g., sex, age, marital status and school location). The results are shown in Table 2. The data indicate that those individuals who are more favorably inclined to engage in militant action are males, younger (less than 29 years of age) employed in the secondary school. Interestingly, these three groups had more favorable evaluations of both strikes for teachers and unions for teachers. This finding supports the data previously collected and reported by Cole and Lieberman.

There is not as clear a relationship between these demographic factors and the predisposition to engage in professional activities, however. Only in the case of females and elementary teachers was there a statistically significant relationship between these demographic factors and teacher attitudes towards any of the professional activities. Apparently, these personal background factors are not as potent in shaping attitudes towards professional activities as they are in shaping attitudes towards more militant activities. It may well be that because professional activities are less controversial and less visible, they are influenced by factors other than demographic considerations, whereas the more highly visible and dramatic militant activities attract the support of individuals with particular

characteristics. In any event, there is a strong relationship between younger male secondary teachers and favorable evaluations of militant activities, and an absence of a strong relationship between any of the other demographic factors and attitudes towards professional activities.

Personal Background Factors and Commitment

Demographic characteristics not only affect attitudes themselves, they also will affect an individual's predisposition to commit himself to either his profession or his organization. Table 3 reports the relationship between these four factors and commitment to either the profession or the organization. These data indicate that those teachers who are more professionally committed tend to be 46 years of age and older, female, and married, whereas those individuals who tend to be more organizationally committed tend to be 30 years of age and older, female, employed in the elementary schools. This data suggests three findings. In the first place, not everyone is equally committed to the organization. Commitment varies, at least for these four groups. Secondly, it is apparent that there two classes of teachers, those who are committed to both the profession and the organization, and those who are committed to neither. As an example, older females tend to be committed to both the organization and the profession, whereas males and secondary teachers tend to be committed to neither. Thirdly, the less committed groups seem to have the favorable attitudes toward militant activities. The data reported in Table 2, for instance, indicate that this group of less committed teachers (e.g., male, younger, employed in secondary schools) are the ones who are the most favorable towards evaluating militant activities. Therefore, this less committed group accounts for a high proportion of the predisposition to engage in militant activities.

Demographic Factors and the Commitment-Attitude Relationship

Not only do demographic considerations influence teachers' attitudes and their predisposition to commit themselves, they also effect the relationship between the teacher's commitment and his attitudes. It is to this relationship that we now turn our attention. The data presented in Table 4 reports the differential impact of various demographic factors on the relationship between commitment and attitude.

In the first place, it is apparent from the data that the demographic factors of sex and age most affect the general relationship between commitment and attitude, but that these two variables affect the relationship differentially. The data previously reported in Table 1, indicated a statistically significant relationship between organizational and professional commitment and negative evaluation of militant activities. The data presented in Table 4 indicate clearly that this relationship is primarily a function of the attitudes of the female strata in the population. It is only in the case of the female group that commitment is significantly related to negative evaluations of militant activities. We hypothesize that the relationship for females between high commitment and unfavorable evaluation of militant activities may reflect generalized societal norms. Females presumably are less aggressive and the female teachers in our sample may well be reflecting this general societal inhibition.

The data did not reveal a positive relationship between commitment and evaluation of these militant activities for males, however, as might have been expected based on the data presented in Table 2. The data in Table 4 indicate that commitment for males does not affect their attitudes toward these militant activities. Rather, even though males tend to be more favorable towards these militant activities, commitment to either the organization or the occupation is not associated with their attitudes towards these activities.

Age is the second demographic variable which significantly affects the relationship between commitment and attitudes. The data reported in Table 4 indicate that younger teachers tend to more favorably evaluate professional activities. Thus, the data reported in Table 1, which indicated that high commitment was associated with positvie evaluation of professional activity is a function primarily of the attitudes held by the younger group of teachers, and not by the entire teaching body. Surprising, while the data reported in Table 3 indicated that older teachers tended to be more committed than younger teachers to both their profession and their organization, this commitment by that older group does not seem to be related to their attitudes towards either professional or militant activities. In addition, the relationship between high commitment and favorable evaluation of professional activities for only the younger teachers indicates that the findings reported in Table 2 (that younger teachers more favorably evaluate militant action) is a phenomena primarily of the number of noncommitted young teachers. The younger uncommitted teacher may more favorably evaluate militant activity, but, taking the younger teacher group as a whole, the more highly committed younger teacher more favorably evaluates professional activities. Thus, it may be hypothesized that this younger group is more involved in their profession. This may arise possibly out of their more recent exposure to the socializing training institutions. In addition, given certification requirements there is a high probability that many of these younger teachers are currently involved in continuing graduate education. In short, this group of younger teachers is probably more actively involved in their profession, and this may well account for the relationship between high commitment and favorable evaluation of professional activities in this group.

Secondly, there are differential impacts of organizational and professional commitment. In general, those who have high organizational commitment tend to have more negative evaluations of militant activity than those who have high professional commitment. All strata (except male and secondary teachers) with high organizational commitment tend to evaluate militant actions favorably. On the other hand, of those with high professional commitment, only single teachers and those employed in the elementary school tend to evaluate these militant activities as unfavorable. This seems to indicate that those who are professionally committed would be less reluctant to engage in militant tactics. For example, previous data have indicated that younger uncommitted teachers are favorably inclined to engage in militant behavior. However, younger teachers who are highly committed more favorably evaluated professional activities. There is not however, a statistically significant relationship between the commitment for this younger age group and their unfavorable evaluation of militant activities. It is possible to foresee situations wherein the desire on the part of these younger committed teachers to engage in these professional activities is frustrated. Given their frustrations, this younger professionally committed group may well turn to these militant activities. Thus, even though there is a high relationship between professional and organizational commitment, this relationship is far from perfect. A large number of individuals have high professional commitment without having high organizational commitment. At least currently, those groups with high professional commitment have more favorable evaluation of professional activities. The absence, however, of negative evaluations of militant activities on the part of these professionally committed groups establishes the potential for militancy, if their professional aspirations are frustrated. In this sense, the data would indicate, however, that there are clearly several substrata or subgroups within the overall teaching profession and at least some of these groups

may be more willing than others to engage in militant action to accomplish their professional objectives.

CONCLUSION

The data presented in the preceeding pages clearly indicate that commitment effects attitudinal predispositions of teachers towards either professional or militant activities. It is equally clear that various personal background factors influence both commitment directly and the relationship between commitment and attitudes. This data lends partial support to the findings of both Cole and Corwin. There are some groups of teachers who are committed to their profession and are favorably disposed towards professional activities. The potential exists however, of their adopting a more militant stance if they are frustrated in the pursuit of these professional objectives. This may be particularly true for the younger teacher. For the older teachers, who tend to be more professionally committed, but who are neither particularly positively or negatively predisposed towards either professional or militant activities, a frustration of their professional aspirations may also lead them to seek more militant tactics. For females in particular, and those who are organizationally committed, in general, their strong negative evaluations of militant activities may well moderate any tendency on the part of the teacher group as a whole to engage in these disruptive activities. However it is the author's observations (confirming anecdotely the findings of Cole) that often even those teachers who are organizationally committed (e.g., long service elementary school female teachers) can be persuaded, by the press of circumstances to endorse militant action. Thus, our data by pointing out the various background and commitment factors which produce differential attitudes, demonstrates that Corwin is, at one and the same time, correct for some groups and incorrect for others, and that commitment will differentially effect various strata in the overall teaching group.

Footnotes

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Table 1

Attitudinal Issues	Professional Commitment		Organizational Commitment	
	Chi Square Values	Relationship to Commitment (+ or -)	Chi Square Values	Relationship to Commitment (+ or -)
Professional Issues				
Teaching as a Career	41.14***	(+)	13.48**	(+)
Professional Associations Representing Teachers	8.73	(+)	11.45	(+)
Teacher-Administrator Cooperation	11.66*	(+)	12.62**	(+)
Collective Bargaining Issues				
Strikes by Teachers	26.67***	(-)	29.70***	(-)
Unions for Teachers	20.86***	(-)	32.17***	(-)

Significance:

* at .10 level
** at .05 level
*** at .01 level

d.f. = 6

Table 2

Attitudinal Issues	Sex	Age	Elementary/Secondary Teachers
Professional Issues			
Teaching as a Career	4.33	2.50	3.46
Professional Associations Representing Teachers	5.16	6.30	4.40
Teacher-Administrator Cooperation	8.43**	6.84	14.56***
Collective Bargaining Issues			
Strikes by Teachers	36.13***	24.31***	6.06
Unions for Teachers	20.82***	14.22**	19.69***

Significance:
** at .05 level
*** at .01 level

d.f. = 3 (Sex)
d.f. = 6 (Age)
d.f. = 3 (E/S Teachers)

Table 3

Professional Commitment vs Age

Age	Frequencies	Professional Commitment: Low	Medium	High
29 and under	Expected	(27)	(35)	(72)
	Actual	32	38	-64
30-45	Expected	(28)	(36)	(73)
	Actual	26	43	-68
46 and up	Expected	(22)	(28)	(58)
	Actual	19	18	71
	Total	77	99	203

N = 379, Chi Square = 10.99, d.f. = 4, p .05

Professional Commitment vs Sex

Sex	Frequencies	Professional Commitment: Low	Medium	High
Male	Expected	(24)	(29)	(61)
	Actual	30	35	49
Female	Expected	(61)	(71)	(151)
	Actual	55	65	163
	Total	85	100	212

N = 397, Chi Square = 6.98, d.f. = 2, p .05

Table 3 (Cont'd)

Professional Commitment vs Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequencies	Professional Commitment		
		Low	Medium	High
Single	Expected	(24)	(27)	(57)
	Actual	34	17	56
Married	Expected	(59)	(66)	(140)
	Actual	49	75	141
	Total	83	92	197

N = 372, Chi Square = 10.79, d.f. = 2, p .01

Organizational Commitment vs Sex

Sex	Frequencies	Organizational Commitment		
		Low	Medium	High
Male	Expected	(22)	(34)	(55)
	Actual	29	41	40
Female	Expected	(55)	(86)	(139)
	Actual	48	79	154
	Total	77	120	194

N = 391, Chi Square = 11.04, d.f. = 2, p .01

Table 3 (Cont'd)

Organizational Commitment vs Age

Age	Frequencies	Organizational Commitment: Low	Medium	High
29 and under	Expected	(26)	(41)	(68)
	Actual	35	51	49
30-45	Expected	(25)	(41)	(68)
	Actual	17	42	75
46 and up	Expected	(20)	(33)	(53)
	Actual	19	22	65
	Total	71	115	189

N = 375, Chi Square = 20.61, d.f. = 4, p .01

Organizational Commitment vs Elementary/Secondary Teachers

E/S	Frequencies	Organizational Commitment: Low	Medium	High
Elementary	Expected	(51)	(79)	(128)
	Actual	45	66	147
Secondary	Expected	(27)	(43)	(69)
	Actual	33	56	50
	Total	78	122	197

N = 397, Chi Square = 16.21, d.f. = 2, p .01

Table 3 (Cont'd)

Organizational Commitment vs District

District	Frequencies	Organizational Commitment: Low	Medium	High
North Tonawanda	Expected	(44)	(68)	(110)
	Actual	37	63	122
Frontier	Expected	(34)	(54)	(87)
	Actual	41	59	75
	Total	78	122	197

N = 397, Chi Square = 6.07, d.f. = 2, p .05

Table 4

Significant Relationships Between Commitment and Attitudes by Demographic Factor

Demographic Factors	High Professional Commitment		High Organizational Commitment	
	Favorable evaluation of professional activities	Unfavorable evaluation of militant activities	Favorable evaluation of professional activities	Unfavorable evaluation of militant activities
Males	Teaching as a Career	---	---	---
Females	Teaching as a Career	Strikes for Teachers	Teaching as a Career	Strikes for Teachers Unions for Teachers
Under 29	Teacher/Administrator Cooperation, Teaching as a Career	---	Professional Status of Teaching, Teaching as a Career	Strikes for Teachers Unions for Teachers
30-45	Teaching as a Career, Professional Associations	---	---	Strikes for Teachers
46 and up	---	---	---	---
Single	Teaching as a Career, Teacher/Administrator Cooperation	Strikes for Teachers	Teacher/Administrator Cooperation	Strikes for Teachers Unions for Teachers
Married	Teaching as a Career	Unions for Teachers	---	Strikes for Teachers Unions for Teachers
Elementary	Teaching as a Career	Strikes for Teachers Unions for Teachers	---	Strikes for Teachers Unions for Teachers
Secondary	Teaching as a Career	---	Teacher/Administrator Cooperation, Professional Status of Teaching	---